Symposium Gender Apartheid and Islam Part 1

Symposium: Gender Apartheid and Islam

By Jamie Glazov
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Does Islam have the keys within itself to liberate women within Muslim social structures? To discuss this issue with us today, Frontpage Symposium has assembled a distinguished panel. On the side of the possibility of a feminist Islam, joining us today are:

Mohamed El-Mallah, a board member of Al-Ittihad Mosque in Vista, former board member of Islamic Center of San Diego, and an associate member of the Muslim American Society. A native of Egypt who migrated to the U.S. seven years ago, he is an activist in the Muslim Community of San Diego who has given many series of presentations on Islamic History,

and

Julia Roach, a UCSD student currently pursuing a bachelor's in literatures of the world, specializing in gender issues and women in literature. She converted to Islam in 2003.

On the side of Islam being mutually exclusive with women's rights, we are joined by:

Ali Sina, the founder of Faith Freedom International (www.faithfreedom.org), a movement of ex-Muslims created to provide support for those who want to leave Islam and give factual information about Islam for others,

and

Robert Spencer, the director of Jihad Watch and the author of Onward Muslim Soldiers: How Jihad Still Threatens America and the West (Regnery Publishing), and Islam Unveiled: Disturbing Questions About the World's Fastest Growing Faith (Encounter Books).

FP: Mr. El-Mallah, Robert Spencer, Julia Roach and Ali Sina, welcome to Frontpage Symposium.

Mr. El-Mallah, let me begin with you. Can Islam liberate women and give them equality? Or is Islam and women's rights mutually exclusive?

El-Mallah: Thanks for inviting me Jamie.

I will go back 1425 lunar years to answer your question. A woman came to the Prophet (PBUH) and asked him: "Why women are not mentioned (in Islamic sources: Quran and

Hadith) as much as men?" Do you know how the Prophet (PBUH) answered? He answered her publicly, he went directly to the Masjid, and asked all the people to gather and from the pulpit he addressed the people by reciting the verse Q33:35 that says: "For Muslim men and women, for believing men and women, for devout men and women, for true men and women, for men and women who are patient and constant, for men and women who humble themselves, for men and women who give in charity, for men and women who fast (and deny themselves), for men and women who guard their chastity, and for men and women who engage much in Allah's praise, for them has Allah prepared forgiveness and great reward." This verse clarifies that the rule is whenever the pronoun "He" is used, it can be substituted by the noun "She" with few exception, which are clearly explained in other verses of Quran and sayings of the Prophet (PBUH).

I would like to point out that the first to accept Islam was a woman, the first martyr in Islam was a woman, one of the longest chapters in Quran is named "The Women," another chapter is named "Mariam". We need to separate between what some of the Muslims practice, and what Islam is ordering us to do. We cannot put Islam on a trial because of wrongs that are done by people who have been living in countries that teach them nothing about Islam. Most of the wrongs that you see done by some Muslims, are done because the lack of good Islamic understanding.

Giving the above, we can categorize the reasons behind any misconceptions about women in Islam into two: The lack of knowledge of Islamic teachings and the ill-intentions of Islam bashers.

FP: Ms. Roach?

Roach: First I would like to preface my comments with a sad fact that exists within the current state of the Ummah or worldwide Islamic community: it is unfortunate that Islam is not practiced in all parts of the world by all Muslims to the standard prescribed by Allah in the Qur'an and exemplified by the blessed prophet Mohamed (peace and blessing of Allah be upon him.)

Nor is Christianity or Buddhism always practiced by all practitioners as it supposed to be. However, when we examine the conduct of those Muslims striving to seek knowledge as they have been commanded by their Lord we find that those people are practicing the deen of Islam in light of its sacred texts and the traditions of the prophets (may the blessings of Allah be upon them all) which do contain proof that women's equality and Islam are not mutually exclusive.

The first and perhaps foremost important aspect of this is spiritual or religious equality: Women's souls have equal value to those of Men's as proved by numerous verses in the Qur'an in which Allah references the believing men and the believing women with equal importance and responsibility in terms of religious obligations such as charity, fasting, prayer, humility etc. Unlike the tradition practiced by some Christians in which the woman submits to

her husband who then in turn submits to God, Muslim women are to submit to the Lord of the worlds Allah first and foremost, they do not need an emissary to answer for them.

Muslim women can pray by themselves or in a group in which no male need be present to worship their lord and that worship will be accepted as much as any other person's worship (in sha Allah, If God wills). Similarly a woman's sin is counted as much as a man's too! A woman's rights are protected, such as the right to life, which women could not be guaranteed in the pre-Islamic Arabian period (many female infants were murdered because boy children were preferred, Islam abolished this practice and Allah mentions the testimony of the murdered female child as being one characteristic of the day of Judgment). What right could be more serious than to be able to fight and die in battle?

Muslim women have had the right and opportunity to fight and die in battle for the past 1400 years, a right which was just recently bequeathed to American women, and the death of a female in battle counts just as much as a man's death: she is still a martyr and merits paradise (in sha Allah).The first martyr in Islam was a woman, women fought alongside the Prophet (pbuh) in numerous battles, some sustaining serious injuries. Muslim women have always had the right to vote and their vote has always equalled a man's, the right to own and dispose of property without having to obtain permission from male kin, the right to work outside the home, the right to equal work for equal pay, the right to keep her hard earned money for herself, the right to marry whom they wish and deny whom they wish, the right to sexual satisfaction within her marriage, (if a woman is unsatisfied she can obtain a divorce) etc. etc. etc.

I will not burden you with too much more (yes there is more!) It is unfortunate that more people do not get beyond their conception of the headscarf and ask us why we are proud to wear it...because we are Muslims and we are happy with our Lord and our lives, we are not being smashed by gender inequalities when we stand up for our own rights. Oh, one more thing, Muslim women are required to educate themselves about their deen and are urged to receive a formal education of some sort, putting them on the intellectually equal playing field as well.

FP: Ok Mr. Spencer, would you like to respond? A lot of this is about our definitions of “equality” and “freedom” isn’t it? What we think women’s “liberty” means is not necessarily what many Muslims take it to mean. Right?

Spencer: You are right Jamie. The nomenclature problem is akin to that over the word “terrorism”: some Muslims today denounce terrorism but don’t consider suicide attacks in Israel or even 9/11 to be terrorism at all. And speaking of names, it really makes no difference that “one of the longest chapters in Qur’an is named The Women, another chapter is named Mariam,” as Mr. El-Mallah points out (as do many other Islamic apologists). There are also chapters of the Qur’an entitled “Spoils of War” (8), “Haggling” (64), “Divorce” (65), “Soul-Snatchers” (79), “The Cheats” (83), “The Earthquake” (99), “The Calamity” (101), “The Traducer” (104), and “The Disbelievers” (109). That’s not to say that the Qur’an regards

women as on the level of a calamity or an earthquake, but only that to bear the name of a sura of the Qur'an is not automatically a sign of approval.

And while it is true that, as Mr. El-Mallah says, "We need to separate between what some of the Muslims practice, and what Islam is ordering us to do," I wish he had chosen to explore more of what Islam teaches about women. After all, the question before us is "Does Islam contain within itself the keys to liberate women within contemporary Islamic societies?" In order to consider this question fully, the obstacles to such liberation must be addressed: Qur'anic verses such as 4:34 (which enjoins wife-beating) and those that make a woman's testimony (2:282) and inheritance (4:11) worth half of a man's do indeed involve Islamic teachings, not just cultural practices. There are also numerous ahadith that reflect poorly on women, including one in which Muhammad declares that most of hell's population is female and that women are deficient in intelligence and piety (*Bukhari*, I:6:304).

Sura 4:34, which has recently been advanced as a valid principle for conduct by Muslim spokesmen in Turkey, Spain, and elsewhere, makes for an atmosphere in which abuse of women is epidemic. The Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences, for example, has determined that over nine out of ten Pakistani wives have been struck, beaten, or abused sexually for offenses on the order of cooking an unsatisfactory meal. It is the Qur'anic mandate for this abuse that makes it hard for me to accept Mr. El-Mallah's contention that where women suffer in the Islamic world, it is because of a "lack of good Islamic understanding."

Ms. Roach also mentions none of this, and instead attempts to deflect attention to Christianity, which is allegedly worse. But there is no analogy to Qur'an 4:34 in the Christian Bible, and even if there were, it is off the point. The question before us is whether Islam, not Christianity, liberates women. Muslims who care for the equality of dignity and human rights of women must acknowledge the existence of the material from the Qur'an and Sunnah that I have quoted above and other similar passages, and find some way to mitigate their destructive force among Muslims. I hope Mr. El-Mallah and Ms. Roach will take up that challenge.

FP: Mr. Sina?

Sina: Hello Jamie and thank you for inviting me to this symposium.

Mr. El-Mallah quotes the verse 33:35 where men and women are mentioned and their responsibilities and rewards are enumerated. How Mr. El-Mallah concludes that this verse establishes equality between man and woman is beyond me. If I say to you that you and your dog should not walk on the grass, should do this or should do that, does that imply that you and your dog are equal? I see no hint of equality in that verse.

Let us see what the Quran says about women. It says “men have a degree (of advantage) over them” 2:228 ; that the witness of woman is worth half of that of man 2:282; that women inherit half of their male siblings, 4:11-12; that a man can marry two or three or four women 4:3; that if a women becomes captive in a war, her Muslim master is allowed to rape her 33:50; that if a woman is not totally submissive to her husband she will enter Hell 66:10; that women are “tilth” for their husbands (to cultivate them) 2:223; that men are in charge of women, as if women were imbeciles or minors who could not take care of themselves; that they must be obedient to their husbands or be admonished (verbally abused), banished from the bed (psychologically abused) and beaten (physically abused) 4:34.

These verses define the station of women in Islam.

Another “proof” that Mr. El-Mallah presents to prove the high status of women in Islam is that one of the long surahs of the Qur’an is named "Women". Mr. Spencer has answered this correctly. May I also remind Mr. El-Mallah that the longest surah of the Qur’an is named "Cow" (286 verses). The surah Women is only 176 verses. According to Mr. El Mallah’s logic, cows must have a higher status than women. Another big surah is surah Livestock. It has 165 verses. Therefore women are just eleven points superior to livestock but 110 points inferior to cows. In fact even insects and bugs such as bees, ants and spiders have surahs named after them. Should women be trilled for having a surah named after them when even spiders have one?

Another “proof” presented by Mr. El Mallah is the fact that the first believer in Muhammad was a woman. Why should this be an indication that women have equal rights?

The next “evidence” that he presents is that the first martyr in Islam also was a woman. Muslims must think this is such a convincing proof that it was also presented by Ms. Roach.

Apart from the fact that this in no ways indicates equality of rights for women in Islam the story is apocryphal. Our Muslim friends are talking about Summayyah. Ibn Sa’d is the only historian that says Summayyah suffered martyrdom in the hands of Abu Jahl. If this martyrdom really had occurred; it would have been trumpeted forth by every biographer and would have been reported in innumerable traditions. This is just an example of the exaggerations that Muslims have been fond of making from the beginning.

In fact the same biographer also claims that Bilal was also the first martyr, though he long survived the alleged persecutions, came back to Mecca and chanted the Azan from the roof top of Ka’ba after Muhammad conquered that town and he died a natural death.

Ibn Sa’d describes that Summayyah, her husband Yasir and their son Ammar were persecuted in Mecca (p. 227) But after Yasir (who died of natural causes) Summayyah married the Greek slave Azrak and with him had a son called Salma. How then are we to understand that she died under persecution? Azrak belonged to Taif, and was one of the slaves who at the siege of that city (some fifteen years later), fled over to Muhammad’s camp. It is natural to conclude that Summayyah, after Yasir's death, married Azrak, and lived at Taif.

Ms. Roach laments that Islam is not practiced in all parts of the world by all Muslims to the standard prescribed by Allah in the Qur'an.

For that we should give thanks to God. Imagine if all Muslims were to stone or hang victims of rape or flog women for minor offenses such as exposing a flock of hair. In fact, the countries that practice Islam to its fullest are truly barbaric. Just think of the suffering of the women in Afghanistan during the rule of the Taliban. Women were not allowed to go out of their homes or work. Male doctors were not allowed to visit female patients. So, when women became sick, there was no one to take care of them and they died. The more a country becomes Islamic the more hellish it gets.

Ms. Roach comforts herself by thinking that after women die they can expect to be treated equally and says "Women's souls have equal value to those of Men's". In other words, what she is saying is that while women live a life of slavery, abuse and deprivation in this world they can rejoice because after they die they will be treated equally. Although I find this a vacuous bargain, the truth is that even this promise is not true. Women in Islam are not treated equally even in death.

Men are promised many virgins after they die. What do women get? They get their old lousy husband to share with 72 voluptuous celestial virgins. With that many high-bosomed houries why would any man want to spend a night with an old wife? Do women get also young celestial studs to have orgies with? No they don't. They have to maintain their "modesty" even after their death. The truth is that in Islam men and women are not treated equally even after their death.

In fact, according to Muhammad few women ever make it to Paradise . The majority of them end up in Hell. Let us see what the Prophet says in this regards. This is where he describes his hallucinatory visit to hell and paradise:

"Then I saw the (Hell) Fire, and I have never before, seen such a horrible sight as that, and I saw that the majority of its dwellers were women." The people asked, "O Allah's Apostle! What is the reason for that?" He replied, "Because of their ungratefulness." It was said. "Do they disbelieve in Allah (are they ungrateful to Allah)?" He replied, "They are not thankful to their husbands and are ungrateful for the favors done to them. Even if you do good to one of them all your life, when she seems some harshness from you, she will say, "I have never seen any good from you.' " Bukhari 7.62.125

Ms. Roach says Muslim women can pray by themselves. Is that the sign of their equality and liberation? Can't women of other Faiths pray by themselves? Wouldn't God accept their prayers?

Ms. Roach says that in pre-Islamic Arabia female infants were murdered and Islam abolished that. Muslims truly believe that this was a common practice. If that was the case, where did Arab women came from? They also claim that Muhammad raised the status of women by limiting a man to no more than four wives. How could Arab men have so many wives if they practiced female infanticide?

Perhaps some ignorant people killed their newborn daughters, but that could not have been a common practice. Infanticide is just against human nature. After all, Arabs were also humans. They must have had the same kind of parental instincts that we have. Even animals have parental instinct. Yes exceptions always occur. Even today female infanticide is practiced in China and in India . But it is an abhorrent practice frowned by the society and punished by the law. The cases are extremely rare. The pre-Islamic Arabia could not have been different. What Muhammad said was commonsense and agreed by everyone. Let me make an example. We read in the news that some men kill their wives. How common is this practice? It is extremely rare. But suppose I declare myself a prophet and among other things prohibit wife killing. Not a big deal, everybody knows wife killing is bad. A thousand years from now my zealot followers claim that in Pre-Sinaic period of ignorance people practiced wife killing and his holiness Ali Sina (pbuh) abolished this repugnant practice. How ludicrous does it sound to you? Well, it is no more ludicrous than the claim of the Muslims that Muhammad abolished female infanticide

Among the “rights” of the Muslim women, Ms. Roach claims that the “right” to fight in battle is the most important. She says “*What right could be more serious than to be able to fight and die in battle*?”

Is this a right? Wouldn’t it have been better if instead of wars Muhammad had brought peace to the world and gave women (and men and children) the right to live in peace? He called upon Muslims to wage war in the name of God and shed the blood of their fellow human beings.2:216, 9:39 Is this something good? Didn’t humans have enough wars already? Did they need a prophet from God to give them the “right” to kill and die? He took away the right to think, the right to believe in the faith of one’s choice, the right to self determination and instead gave them the right to wage war, to kill, to hate, to “instill terror in the heart of the enemy” 8:12, to destroy this world and to die. Is this a right? This is like saying Muhammad gave Muslims the right to live in hell, the right to be slaves, the right to be abused and tortured.

In America and other civilized countries, people have the right to freedom, to life and to the pursuit of happiness. In Islam Muslims have the right to wage war and to die. Are we still supposed to believe Islam is a divine religion? The problem with Islam is that it destroys one's values. The right becomes wrong and evil is praised as good. Now seriously: how does a Muslim woman fight wrapped in her burqa? That is something worth seeing.

Furthermore, are non-Muslim women prohibited to fight if they want to? Do we know of any women in any society that does not have the "right" to fight and die?

Maybe Ms. Roach should read the biography of her prophet once again. She will notice that even the pagans used to take their wives to the battlefield. In the battle of Uhud it was Hind, the wife of Abu Sofyan, who was roaring like a lioness and encouraging the men to march forward. In those days women used to accompany their husbands to the battle to provide logistics for them and to nurse them if they were wounded. Muhammad did what other Arabs did. However, after Islam, when Muslims started to put into practice their prophet’s

teachings, they found there was no room for women anywhere -- including in the battlefield -- and hence women were discarded and were relegated to second class citizens.

Ms. Roach says “Muslim women have always had the right to vote”. How can this be true when even Muslim men do not have the right to vote? In Islam there is no democracy. How can you vote where there is no democracy? Lack of democracy in Islam is another interesting subject worth exploring.

Ms Roach says women in Islam have the right to own and dispose of property without having to obtain permission from their male kin. Is she forgetting that Khadijah, prior to marring Muhammad was a businesswomen who had made a fortune running her own trading business and who had many men at her service? Can women succeed in any Islamic country the way Khadijah succeeded in a pagan society? Was there a single woman after Khadijah in any Islamic country during these 1400 years that has rivaled her success? The answer is no! Doesn’t this prove that there are fewer opportunities in Islamic world for women than what Khadijah had in a pagan world? It is clear that women have lost their rights after Islam and did not gain anything from it.

Ms. Roach says Muslim women have the right to work outside the home. I wonder why she did not tell that to the Taliban. They prohibited women from working outside the home. Also I would like to ask her how a woman can work outside the home when she can’t be in a room alone with a man and can’t travel alone without a male kin (mahram). Muhammad discouraged women from going out of their home and in fact he said that it is better for them to pray in the privacy of their home (read prisons) than pray in the mosque. In some Islamic countries women are not even allowed to drive a car. How they are supposed to go to work if they can’t even get there unless someone drives them to and from work?

Ms. Roach says Muslim women have the right to marry whom they wish. I ask her, how can a 9 year old child consent to a marriage? How can a Muslim woman be free in her choice when she is not even allowed to date the man whom she is planning to marry in order to know him? How can you choose when you do not even know the person? What choice one has? How can you make any intelligent and educated decision when you do not know your prospect mate? A blind choice is not a choice.

She also claims that a Muslim woman has the right to sexual satisfaction within her marriage and clarified that “if a woman is unsatisfied she can obtain a divorce”. Is that true? Under the Sharia women are not allowed to divorce even if their husband beats them. The decision to divorce rest only on man's whims. Now imagine a women going to a Judge demanding divorce accusing her husband of impotency. How can you humiliate the gigantic ego of a Muslim man and expect to live after that? She will be a dead woman the next day. If she survives and manages to divorce, she will be seen as a whore by everyone. A divorced woman has nowhere to go in the Islamic world. I do not know whether Ms. Roach has ever lived in an Islamic country. Muslim women are not allowed to have any libido. It is not pious for women to have sexual feelings. In fact the genital mutilation is designed to take away any sexual pleasure from them. Women are not supposed to enjoy sex. If they have any libido,

there is a risk that they may fornicate and commit sin. Women must only provide satisfaction to their husbands and deny all their own sexual needs. According to a tradition:

Allah's Apostle said, "If a husband calls his wife to his bed (i.e. to have sexual relation) and she refuses and causes him to sleep in anger, the angels will curse her till morning." Bukhari 4.54.450

It is hilarious to think that the angels have nothing better to do than sit around and curse the poor woman all the night for depriving them from watching the live porno show. If Allah must punish woman for not satisfying the sexual needs of their husbands why does he needs angels to lobby him for it? Isn't it a waste of angel's resources?

In one sense this is all truly very funny. But in another, much larger sense, it is a tragedy.

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